

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election without airing a corresponding anti-Bush documentary is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. This leads to outright corruption of the news reporting system, in which the media companies distort or even fabricate the news in favor of their political allies in return for regulatory favors -- eventually even including complete removal of the already eroded legal obligation to serve the public interest. Once this obligation is eroded to nothing, the press will cease to have any function as a check against excesses and corruption in government and the private sector, and instead will become a fully compliant agent of these evils.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to be more than a rubber stamp.